



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Veteran Connection

VA Portland Health Care System Newsletter

**Keeping the Promise - Advancing Excellence**



## VA Portland Health Care System

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Produced by the VAPORHCS  
Public Affairs Office

**QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??**

Please email us at...

[VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov](mailto:VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov)

or call 503-402-2975

### *Lincoln's Promise (VA Mission Statement)*

*"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.*

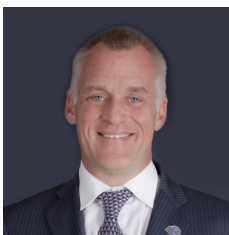
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For [VAPORHCS Events and Classes](#)—got to the VAPORHCS Web page...

[www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp](http://www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp)

## Message from the Director



Michael W. Fisher  
Director, VA Portland  
Health Care System

There are no words that can fully show the appreciation each and every one of our volunteers deserve for the time and service they have given to our Veterans and staff. It is with their help that we continue to fulfill the promise of caring for our Veterans. Everyday our volunteers spend time at the bedside of inpatients; deliver needed comfort items; make and deliver coffee to the outpatient waiting rooms throughout our healthcare system to include our CBOCs; assist in transporting Veterans as a part of our Veterans Transportation Network or Vancouver Shuttle cart program with endless hours on the road and thousands of miles driven helping Veterans get to their appointments. Volunteers bring more than their service to the halls of our health care system; they bring life; they help make a clinic a community; they give laughter, share tears, honor our Veteran patients, and inspire our staff.

We honor the impact and positive influence they have on those Veterans and family members they serve and the

indelible impression they leave with the VA staff they support. The lives they touch and the services they enhance go well beyond these measures, but here are a few facts should help provide an idea of just how valuable their contributions are:

- VA's voluntary service is one of the largest volunteer programs in the federal government.
- Nationally, during fiscal year (FY) 2016, VA volunteers and organizations donated more than 11 million hours of service and more than \$71 million in gifts and donations for a total value of \$325.8 million through volunteer service and giving.
- At VAPORHCS, more than 750 volunteers provided 104,000+ hours of service to Veterans last year valued at nearly \$2.5 million in labor (50 full-time positions).
- In FY 2016, VAPORHCS received donated funds of \$989,000 in cash and in-kind donations for a combined value of \$3.32 million plus a \$7 million gift for the Fisher House in Vancouver.

Our volunteers are vital to the Veteran's experience and I simply cannot thank each of them enough.

As always, thank you for your service and for letting us serve you.

Michael Fisher

## VETERANS TOWN HALL

**VAPORHCS & VBA Portland Regional Office  
Veterans Town Hall and Claims Clinic**



**FOR WHO?** Veterans, family members and media representatives are invited

**WHEN?** June 5, 2017; Claims Clinic is 5-7:30 p.m.; Town Hall 6-7:30 p.m.

**WHERE?** **Portland VA Medical Center** Auditorium and broadcasted via [Facebook Live](#)

**WHAT?** At the **Claims Clinic**, Veterans can

speak to specialist about claims issues or to VAPORHCS Patient Advocates about your specific health-related issues or questions. At the **Veterans Town Hall**, get the latest updates from the Directors of VAPORHCS and VBA Portland Regional Office and ask questions and speak to staff.

If you would like to be added to the VAPORHCS Partner email list, please email us at [VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov](mailto:VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov)



## What you should know about Advance Directives

As a VA patient you have a say in the health care you receive. Normally your doctor your options for health care and you get to decide what is best for you. But what happens is you are too ill to make decisions for yourself? Who would you want to make decisions for you? Does this person know what you would or wouldn't want?

Questions like these may be hard to think about, but they're important. That's why VA wants you to know about a legal form you can complete. It's called an advance directive.

### What is an advance directive?

An advance directive is a legal form that helps your doctors and family members understand your wishes about health care. It can help them decide about treatments if you are too ill to decide for yourself. For example, if you are unconscious or too weak to talk. There are two types of advance directives: durable power of attorney for health care and living will. The VA form contains both.

### What is a durable power of attorney for health care?

This form lets you name the person to make health care decisions for you if you can't make them yourself. This person is called your "health care agent." He or she will have the legal right to make health care decisions for you. You can choose any adult to be your agent. It's best to choose someone you trust and who knows you well. You should take to that person to make sure they are willing to be your health care agent.

### Do I have to fill out a durable power of attorney for health care?

No. It's up to you whether you complete a durable power of attorney for health care. If you don't choose a health care agent, your doctor will choose a spokesperson to make decisions for you in the following order: legal guardian (if you have one), spouse, adult child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or a close friend. If your doctor can't find anyone from this list, VA staff or a court will make decisions for you.

### What is a living will?

A living will is a legal form that communicates what kinds of health care you would or wouldn't want if you become ill and can't decide for yourself.

### Do I have to fill out a living will?

No. It's up to you whether you fill out a living will. The purpose of a living will is to help your spokesperson and your doctor make decisions about your care. Whether or not you decide to fill out a living will, it's important to discuss your wishes with others. Talk to your health care agent, your loved ones, your doctors, and your health care team so they understand what is important to you.

**For all the details and forms, please go to the VAPORHCS "Advance Directives" Web page**

**[www.portland.va.gov/patients/advance.asp](http://www.portland.va.gov/patients/advance.asp)**

**Here is a [link to an informational podcast](#) regarding Advance Directives**

# VA Portland Health Care System Research Day



**When:** Tuesday, May 23, 2017

**Time:** 10:00 - 11:30am

**Where:** Portland VA Medical Center Auditorium

*The event will showcase the accomplishments of the following local VAPORHCS scientists:*

- **Julie Graff, MD**, Advances in immunotherapy for prostate cancer
- **Naomi Bramhall, PhD, AuD**, Hidden hearing loss following noise exposure
- **Darren Malinoski, MD**, Therapeutic hypothermia in deceased organ donors improves kidney graft function
- **Jennifer Loftis, PhD**, Alcohol intake causes persistent viral infections and altered immune responses
- **Eric Schnell, MD, PhD**, Adult-born neurons after traumatic brain injury

*Refreshments will be served following the presentations.*

[Please share this event on Facebook](#)



Questions? Call VAPORHCS Public Affairs Office at 503-402-2975 or email us at [VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov](mailto:VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov)



***New VA Access Web site is now live...***

**[www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov)**

How quickly can my VA facility see me?

How satisfied are Veterans with their care in my facility?

How does care in my VA facility compare to other hospitals in the area?

How is the VA system doing with access nationally?

## **What is the Access and Quality Tool?**

This tool allows Veterans to access the most transparent and easy to understand wait time and quality measures across the health care industry. That means Veterans can quickly and easily compare access and quality measures from their VA facility to other VA's and make informed choices about where and when they receive their healthcare.

## **What can Veterans find in the tool?**

How long patients are waiting to be seen in their VA

How Veterans describe their experiences scheduling primary and specialty care

Timeliness of appointments for care needed right away

Information about the quality of healthcare delivered at every medical center compared to local private sector hospitals.

## **Will Veterans be able to use this information to choose their healthcare facility?**

Yes. This information informs Veterans about timeliness of care at VA facilities. The tool helps Veterans compare VA facilities to each other on wait times, veteran experiences with access, and other topics.



## VAPORHCS Lab Professionals — Technologists at work for you

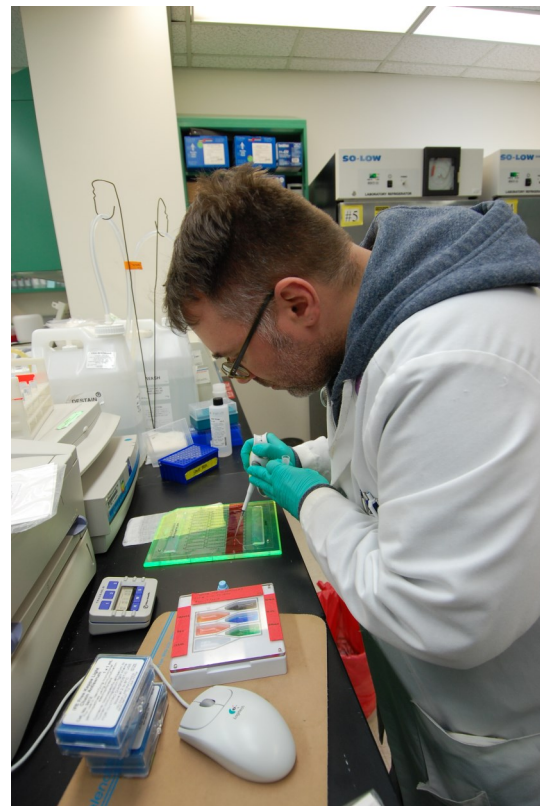
By Phillip Myers

VAPORHCS Public Affairs Volunteer

Several important and (some might think) astounding statistics centered on the Medical Laboratory at VAPORHCS include the following: the Lab does more than three million tests annually; provides support for the entire VISN 20 complex; and is staffed by 100 highly educated medical technologists, pathologists, histologists, cytologists and support staff.

Located on the Portland campus, the VAPORHCS Lab is situated on the second floor of the main hospital. As you enter this complex, the visitor is taken in with the plethora of modern, white modules busy analyzing everything from blood to urine to pathology specimens. Every test counts due to the fact that 70 percent of medical decisions are based on Lab results.

Carol Pfeifle, the Lab's Lead Chemistry Medical Technologist, has been at the VA since 2009. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in micro-biology from Pennsylvania State University. Carol explains that lab employees must be certified to laboratory testing. They are professionals in the true sense of the word. "Many of the testing personnel are medical technologists," says Carol. "Each must hold a four-year bachelor's level degree. These people analyze and test body fluids and tissues. They are responsible for operating and maintaining complex analyzers that are used in the lab, and ensure that the lab results for each patient are accurate and timely."



The VAPORHCS Lab covers analysis areas such as chemistry, hematology, micro-biology, anatomic pathology, histology, cytology and blood banking. And these are no mean tasks. For example, in the chemistry segment, the Portland Lab accomplishes about 1,500 blood work-ups every day. Then there are additional tests in other areas of the lab. Every patient undergoing an operative procedure must be screened via a sequence of tests done in the lab prior to surgery. These screenings look at potential problems related to anemia, viral infections, kidney ailments and other vital situations.



Anatomic pathology and cytology are integral to making and staining slides from tissue and body fluid samples. These slides enable pathologists to evaluate them for cancer. Hematology evaluates blood specimens for signs that the patient is anemic, has an infection, vitamin deficiency, or even leukemia. They are the first to alert the doctor to potential problems. Microbiology is vital to determining what is causing a patient's infection and the best medicines for treatment.

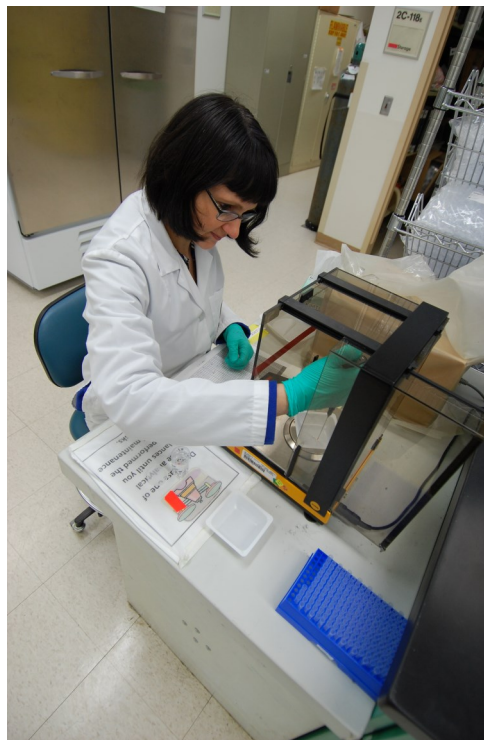
The frontline staff of the lab is the Health Technologists. They assist by collecting and properly handling patient specimens, as well as presenting a "smiling face" to greet Veterans.

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## Lab Professionals (continued)



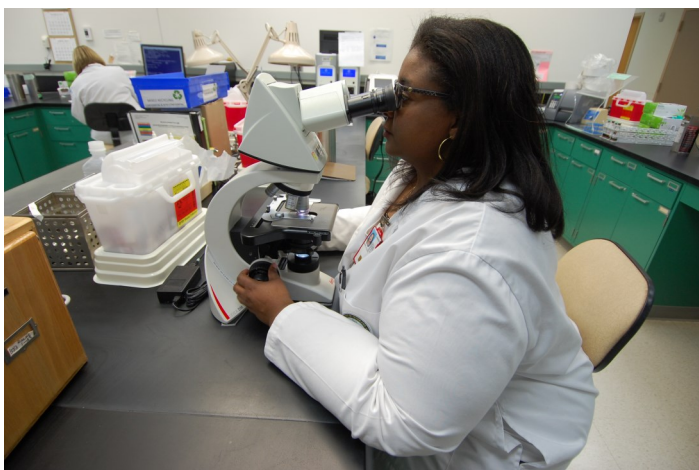
Eva Viers is a medical technologist at the lab and works in the blood bank. There are eight different types of blood and Eva is an expert with all of them. She has been with the VA since 2010, and in addition to her work at the lab, is a prime coordinator for the Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (MLPW) that takes place this year April 23-29. “One of the objectives of MLPW is to educate professionals, the public and others about the role of the laboratory professional in patient care,” says Eva. “As key members of our health care team here at VAPORHCS, we welcome visitors to the lab, and would be pleased to explain what we do.”



Eva also coordinates the blood bank drives at VAPORHCS in conjunction with the American Red Cross. She states that ample blood bank inventories are vital,

and we rely on supplies coming here from the American Red Cross. An example of the need for blood is the fact that liver transplants (performed at VAPORHCS) require 60 to 70 pints of blood components. Eva also is the chair of the laboratory’s Unit Based Council.

Medical technologists are important components in the medical system, drawing on their high level of experience and education. Their devotion to



obtaining the “right answer” to numerous testing procedures ensure the safety



and well-being of Veterans at VAPORHCS. They are vital healthcare detectives, uncovering and providing information from laboratory analyses that assist physicians in patient diagnosis and treatment, as well as in disease monitoring or prevention.



## ***Portland VA Fisher House is celebrating its one-year anniversary! YOU are invited!***



Please join us to tour the home and see what we do each day to serve our Veteran and Military Families! Refreshments will be served.

**Tuesday, May 9, 2017**

**11:00am-2:00pm**

**Portland VA Fisher House**

**1601 E. 4th Plain Blvd**

**Vancouver, WA 98682**

**(Next to Community Living Center)**



### **Did you know?**

**Since opening in March 2016, the Portland VA Fisher House has served**

**Approximately... 725 families, 1,300 individuals, and**

**4,400 nights of lodging!**

## VA Portland Community Resource and Referral Center celebrates 5th anniversary in April

Veterans, community partners, and VA staff celebrated the 5th anniversary of serving Veterans out of the downtown [VA Portland Community Resource and Referral Center \(CRRC\)](#) on April 20. Local Veterans displayed art as part of the event showcasing their talents.

The CRRC has a multi-disciplinary team that includes social workers, a peer specialist, a psychologist and program support assistants. The facility provides access to both VA and community services for eligible Veterans who are homeless or at risk of being homeless that includes, housing placement, mental health, primary care, and social work.



The CRRC team in front of the downtown Portland clinic at 308 SW 1st Ave. on April 20 during the 5th anniversary celebration.

Some VA and community partners who come on-site include: a four-person Primary Care team (doctor, two nurses and a medical support assistant), VBA Homeless Coordinator, Compensation and Pension Examiners, Social Security, Oregon State Department of Labor, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, VA Vocational Rehab, HUD/VASH case managers.



Local Veteran art displayed as part of the CRRC 5th anniversary event on April 20 at the downtown Portland CRRC clinic.



### Did you know?

Since opening in April 2012, the VA Portland Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) has conducted more than **37,000 outpatient appointments**